

W E T M O N E Y

r y a n e c k e s



wet money

ryan eckes



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"Our concern for novelty and so-called originality or newness leads us to become a nation of cultural amnesiacs."

—Lorenzo Thomas, from 1999 interview,
The Poetry Project Newsletter

"The gentrification mentality is rooted in the belief that obedience to consumer identity over recognition of lived experience is actually normal, neutral and value-free."

—Sarah Schulman, from *The Gentrification
of the Mind: Witness to a Lost Imagination*

"There is in our lives a televisual remove that one is afforded as a consumer of everything, a spectator of everything. The great spectator of the world. Nothing happens here, at least nothing that is not entertaining."

—Dionne Brand, from *The Blue Clerk*

the pure products of the liberal imagination
do not exist

the sky is cash only

you drive the car
to work

for an earth of
its excrement

some hard pressed
house in the suburbs—

some bill—

every time you mourn a republican
 a kitten chokes to death
 and it's back to school
 in the smoke of productivity
 there's a pillow in a trash can
 in front of my building
 houses are for sale up & down
 the make-believe
 what do you want
 a new career
 a box fan in the window
 a box of old how-to
 books on proof
 in the pudding
 a televised-ass life
 gas mileage alone
 in the dark
 a last laugh that lets you
 sleep
 and beyond what dollar
 do you stop meaning
 what you say
 and wake up on a cruise
 where the ocean says *leave me alone*
 from the gutted prayer
 in your throat
 proving your puppethood
 enough to renounce
 the profit motive
 forever
 so we can be friends
 and i can stop trying
 to solve
 my own murder

which is a real drag
 since i'm still alive
 waiting in line
 for my certificate of salvage
 from the department of motor vehicles
 on a tuesday
 if i have to scrape out
 someone else's dream
 to bury it properly
 i will scrape out
 someone else's dream
 to bury it properly

a book of stamps

to be on a stamp, you have to be dead ten years. if you were president, only five years.

you learn the rules standing in line at the post office.

in a book called *Standing in Line for Death*, CAConrad wrote, "let us write the news on your newborn's face."

the news today is one capitalist clapped for another but didn't really mean it.

one forever stamp costs 55 cents.

the stamp is self-adhesive. you don't need to lick it.

you want to be liked, if not licked, and affixed to a letter bearing good news.

how to be liked, you wonder.

to be liked, you might perform, you might lie, you might run for president.

you might play dead so you can be part of america.

you might have to.

you might stand in line for a long time while a baby cries and cries.

you check to see who likes you today. look down at your phone for the little hearts.

the phone is your boss. it waits for you to perform. it pays you nothing. you pay *it*.

you don't know who got paid to make the phone. how much or how little. you wonder if they too are standing in line somewhere else in the world.

famous people, people of the stamp, don't care if you know or like the people who made them famous, the people who worked for them.

but famous people, people of the stamp, want you to like them.

famous people, people of the stamp, keep changing their picture on the stamp so that you keep liking them.

you cannot like them enough.

you are on a stamp, too. but it does not get you anywhere. the postman ignores everything under 55 cents.

but you can play the stamp game. like a student in the fox school of business. you play the game while standing in line, waiting for the present.

you hope the present arrives soon. you hope that you have enough to offer it.

you hope that what you *are* and what you *have* are somehow equal.

and you hope that equality lasts forever.

you hope that the hands fall off the clock and paradise grows up around you.

you know that you have worked hard, that you have played the stamp game well, even if few people have received your messages.

surely your points have been adding up and the judges know how to count.

but somehow the line has gotten longer. people must have butted in front of you.

frustrated, you begin stamping the ground w/ your foot. you begin protesting.

the hands of the clock are now moving counterclockwise.

your hair turns gray and you look around you wildly. you call for those near you to join in your protest, since they, obviously, are no better off than you are.

but everyone just stares at you.

would you stop making a scene, they implore you.

can't you see that none of us wants to be here, anyway, they say.

shhhh, would you just be patient!

stop acting like a child!

you're embarrassing us!

then, as if to pacify you, postal workers come over to your part of the line and begin handing out boots to people, single boots, brand-new shiny black boots.

everyone in line then begins licking the bottoms of their boots, lapping at the soles like happy kittens.

impressed upon, you look down at your new boot, smell the fresh leather, then look up at the clock, which has begun ticking clockwise once again.

american federation of teachers

i became a teacher to pay my rent
an adjunct is not an apprentice
i tried to explain at debrief
a onesie w/ a logo pulled over my face
at a desk in an office
next to the young organizer
who would get fired
for succumbing to boredom
like the guy before him
and the woman after him
who failed to like her boss enough
we were trying to build a citywide union
of academics
but nobody was an academic
that's not a real thing
teaching is a job
to pay your rent
organizing can be a job
to pay your rent
as anything can be a job
to pay your rent
the union couldn't hear this
it was run by 6-figured managers
who pitted us against each other
they said get out the vote
for the democratic party
a bunch of landlords
committed to our disposability
and that's where donald trump
comes from

american history

when they say "rebuild the middle class"
they mean build a new stadium
on top of the old new one
using the cheapest labor possible
& wear your hat proudly
on opening day
which is every day
we're having a grand re-opening
today and smile
voting is now open
you can vote for the all-stars
every day
the last word is yours
a brand new stadium
citizens bank park
ice cream in heaven
i paid for this
w/ my vote
every vote counts
every vote pulled himself up
by his own bootstraps
every vote did it all by himself

every vote put himself thru yale
every vote started from the bottom
now we're here
every vote bought his son
a baseball team
every vote mission accomplished
every vote ice cream in my face
you votes don't know how
easy you have it
back in my day voting
was fucking hard
i threw the first pitch
40 years ago
it was a ball
but i was right
all along
the president shook my hand
rush limbaugh signed my ass
it was *me*
all that ever was

wet money

to be rehired every other breath
as if you were never there
nothing ever happened
you never worked here
we never knew each other
the waves crash the shore
you were never here

gasoline and calvinism

when they say "flexibility"
they mean gumby got a raise
for being nice
so why can't you
now watch this drive

people think they're going somewhere
then a plane flies thru your dream

who was it

who built this city,
that city

who speaks for you
when you speak

dozens of little cops point
at each other
in an office

dollars fly out
of their mouths

it's the gig economy

you were going to write me
that letter of recommendation

heaven is waiting
for the applause

injury music

when they say "nothing is free"
they mean "you work for me"

when they say "we don't condone violence"
they mean "you work for me"

when they cart you off the field on a stretcher
thousands of little boss-slaves cheering on
your pain

the super bowl of cheerios
in a sink

this complete breakfast
of losers

i wipe my mouth
w/ a napkin

everything is free

the anthem is a dead white prayer

silly string in the street
the day after

waterfalls are not
hair

states are not
stars

what flag are you
talking about

what do you mean by
"nation"

do you mean the bruises
all over your body

do you mean the people
who nursed you back up

who are you now
all washed up

insurance

you wanna tell me the future
like a professional
the light turns green
there are no cars
i have no money

in a file labeled "the haters"
quotes grow from trees
that don't speak

an owl looks at you
as if it came from nothing
which it did not

its eyes swirl in bark
of older tree, insane,
wise, there

you will learn to live
with an idea of being good
among neighbors in competition

time will stop breathing
everyone afraid
of everyone & everyone
gripping a back-up plan

how much can i pay
every month
to just stand here
like a definition
in the contract
written by one person

a rich person
who will stab me
in the back
at the drop
of a dime

dear customer,

one person isn't going to fix it
all for you

the manager is out to lunch
w/ another manager
counting their votes

so you'll have to just
be a person

on the same level
as the person
who is serving you

right now

the rain

a skull with wings was a way of thinking once, waving

goodbye forever in stone

the rain waves the graves away, the last word, no statue to become

the rain, all small talk, pushes you to sleep

and later the patter on roof pulls open a dream

how strange to be a house and to look outside

there's a statue of a headless mercenary, a bird alights on the neck

red woodpecker

happy international anything month

the sun bakes the hills free of words

no one can pronounce the borders, only some blood of the past

the blood turns moon into rain

leaders say be a good person and the system will work

but every person turns to rain

you can call it the memory of justice

the sun cracks open the streets

dust bunnies hop on the havenue

we're coming to take all your things

love,
the rain

the deal

clouds are laughs
everyone knows that

you have to peel off
the leaders one by
one from your skin

& throw em at the wall
like beer bottles
after the afterparty

then look up
sun drunk in your skull
till a fox jogs out

clouds are laughs
i called the bar the poem
by accident

the poem's been open
since 1930

it was a school
now it's not

i stumbled in
like a regular
i didn't have to

there were no principals
poets were talking
about a leaderless movement

you heard what neruda said
we'll eat in bed & fornicate
in the kitchen if we want

he said it in a movie
to a communist woman
sick of cleaning bourgeois toilets

when we're all equal
who will we all be like
the poets wanted to know

like what kind of fucking jobs
would we have
in order to feed each other

come over at 9, bring a 6
we'll have a reflection
of accidents

daily city thoughts were bark
that cracked off
the dog of a tree

petaled into some new thing
we could use or toss
or riff off

we taught each other how
to carry shards of heaven
friends left for us

what're you working on now
a rose petal in my heart
pocket, a procession

of looping desire & loss
a book of fishes
that mirror clouds

we could put all our books
together to make
one book of fish

we pasted our poems
on storefront windows
and ran

laughs passed though
our fingers
a school of fish

the poem won't go away
clouds are laughs
everyone knows that

one day the poets all
showed up in the street
this is real, the poem said

this is real
the poem will open
forever

the poem won't go away
it will happen again
the poets started showing up

the poets fought for rent control
the poets fought for healthcare
the poets fought for education

the poets fought for socialism
the poets fought for communism
the poets fought for open borders

and the grave won't shut up
but it's okay

the grave won't shut up
it's okay

the grave keeps singing
we believe the customers
are the future

so the students shut it down
the students shut it down

the students shut it down
over & over
the poem won't go away

the future is absent
children are children
clouds are laughs

students are anyone
students are anyone
who know the deal

Ryan Eckes is a poet from Philadelphia. His previous books are *fine nothing* (2019), *General Motors* (2018), *Valu-Plus* (2014), *Old News* (2011), and *when i come here* (2007). Recent poems can be read online in *Prolit*, *Entropy*, *The Tiny*, *Recenter Press Journal*, *Sundog Lit*, *DUSIE* and *Tripwire*.



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"copyright is for cops"

